

Struggling schools get little help from Arizona tax credits



Caitlin McGlade, The Republic | azcentral.com 2:48 p.m. MST November 12, 2014

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Residents who made tax-credited donations to public schools in 2013 largely overlooked a slew of struggling districts
- The disparity created a \$2.8 million gap between the district that collected the most and the one that drew in the least
- The state credits up to \$200 for individuals and \$400 for married couples on their taxes if they donate to extracurricular activities at a public school

Some school districts get a lot more love than others.

Residents who made tax-credit donations to public schools in 2013 largely overlooked a slew of struggling districts. The disparity created a \$2.8 million gap between the district that collected the most and the one that drew in the least.

The state credits up to \$200 for individuals and \$400 for married couples on their taxes if they donate to extracurricular activities at a public school. Residents may choose any district regardless of their address.

Scottsdale Unified School District benefited the most from the program compared to other Valley schools, bringing in \$116 per student.

Conversely, Union Elementary School District collected just \$2.59 per student.

For some districts, like the Fowler Elementary School District, that could mean the difference between sending kids home at the day's end or stoking their imagination through theater and art programs.

Fowler collected \$5.68 per student in 2013.

The district offers some free sports and band activities and sends students on field trips to destinations, including the Grand Canyon — but only if their parents can afford it.

The district also can't afford to host art, theater and dance offerings.

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Marvene Lobato, Fowler Elementary district superintendent

"We have the classrooms, we have the space, we have the buses — we just don't have the extra funds to be able to provide our students with more activities after school," said Marvene Lobato, Fowler Elementary district superintendent.

Phoenix launched an advertising campaign Wednesday that will ask residents and business owners to consider districts like Fowler when they open their checkbooks.

Ads educating people about the tax-credit program and the importance of extra-curricular activities will begin airing on local television and radio stations, as well as on billboards or other printed mediums. The agency that designed the ads, Cramer-Krasselt, also will produce fliers for libraries and senior centers.

The company is working for Phoenix at no cost.

Residents can check out maps and listings at kidsaremissingout.com to see which districts need the most support.

"For too many schools in Phoenix, these learning opportunities have become nice to have rather than must have," Mayor Greg Stanton said.